

# STRENGTHENING NATIONAL DEFENSE & SUPPORTING TROOPS

---

SENATOR MCCAIN COMMITTED HIS LIFE – BOTH IN UNIFORM AND IN CONGRESS – TO STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S NATIONAL DEFENSE AND PROVIDING FOR OUR SERVICE MEMBERS.

## Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee

Following in the footsteps of his predecessor, Senator Barry Goldwater, Senator McCain joined the Armed Services Committee when he was first elected to the Senate in 1986. He served as the committee's ranking member from 2006-2012, and [became chairman in 2015](#). During his tenure at the helm of the committee, Chairman McCain set an aggressive hearing schedule that saw testimony from the nation's top current and former military leaders; paved the way for a bipartisan budget agreement to eliminate the budget caps on defense spending; and led passage of three consecutive *National Defense Authorization Acts* (NDAA) with broad, bipartisan support. In 2018, Senator McCain's colleagues voted unanimously to name the annual bill the [John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019](#) in his honor.

## Providing for Service Members, Veterans and Military Families

As Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator McCain was proud to continue the committee's long history of bipartisan cooperation to provide for America's active duty personnel, veterans and military families. Under his leadership, the committee passed legislation providing our service members with the training, equipment and resources they need to rise to the challenges of a dangerous world. Each year, the NDAA authorized pay raises for troops, invested in modern equipment and advanced training, helped restore military readiness, and provided America's allies and partners the support needed for security missions around the globe.

## Eliminating Sequestration

For years, Senator McCain fought to end the arbitrary budget cuts to the Department of Defense that were enacted by the *Budget Control Act of 2013*. In 2017, he published a white paper titled, [Restoring American Power](#), which called for a bipartisan budget agreement to lift the budget caps on defense and provide \$700 billion of defense spending for fiscal year (FY) 2018. Senator McCain then led the Senate Armed Services Committee in passing the

FY18NDAA, which authorized \$700 billion for defense by an overwhelming 89-8 vote. Senator McCain's relentless advocacy laid the groundwork for a bipartisan budget agreement that Republican and Democratic leaders finally reached in February 2018. The agreement matched Senator McCain's call for \$700 billion for FY18, and delivered another \$716 billion for FY19 – giving the services the budget certainty required to begin the process of rebuilding the military, restoring readiness, and modernizing our forces.

## Defense Acquisition Reform

A stalwart for reform, Senator McCain exercised strong oversight of the Pentagon to eliminate waste and mismanagement. He demanded accountability when weapons systems and programs went over budget, over schedule, or didn't live up to their promise.

In 2003, Senator McCain led the [high-profile investigation](#) into a multibillion dollar Air Force program to procure new aerial refueling tankers. The investigation resulted in a major corruption scandal and led to successful prosecutions of a senior government official and Boeing executive on public corruption charges.

Senator McCain was also an outspoken critic of over-budget and past-schedule weapons programs, including the Army's Future Combat Systems, which was cancelled in 2009 after a \$6 billion investment; the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, which has a lifetime estimate of \$1 trillion; and the Gerald R. Ford Aircraft Carrier, which was \$2 billion over budget. As Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator McCain frequently raised awareness of troubled defense programs in a series of reports titled, ["America's Most Wasted: Indefensible."](#)

To address these scandals and improve the defense procurement process, Senator McCain led the Senate Armed Services Committee to deliver the most sweeping changes to the defense acquisition system in a generation. Senator McCain's [FY16NDAA](#), for example, provided greater authority to the military services to manage their own programs and enhanced the role of the service chiefs in the acquisition process.

The FY16NDAA also delivered long-overdue reforms to make it easier for non-traditional firms to do business with the Pentagon – introducing new competition in the acquisition process and enhancing innovation. The bill removed barriers to new entrants into the defense market, established a new streamlined acquisition process to expedite prototyping and fielding, and reduced unnecessary requirements, reports, and certifications.

## Eliminating Wasteful Spending

Year after year under Senator McCain's leadership, the Senate Armed Services Committee identified billions of dollars in unnecessary spending at the Department of Defense as a result of bloated headquarters and administrative overhead, delayed or troubled weapons programs, and unjustified budget requests. The committee also passed legislation cutting excessive

spending and reinvested savings in providing critical military capabilities for our warfighters, meeting unfunded priorities of our service chiefs and combatant commanders, and supporting critical national security priorities.

## **Military Retirement Reform**

Senator McCain led the committee to deliver significant reforms to modernize the military's archaic [retirement system](#) by extending retirement benefits to the vast majority of service members through a new plan. Under the military's 70-year-old retirement system, 83 percent of service members would leave the service without any retirement assets. The [FY16NDAA](#) created a new plan that now extends retirement benefits to over 80 percent of service members. At the time of the bill's passage, it was estimated that these reforms would achieve approximately \$13 billion in discretionary savings over a decade and approximately \$12 billion per year in steady state mandatory savings.

## **Pentagon Management Reform**

Senator McCain led the effort to reform the Pentagon's management, passing [legislation](#) in 2017 to streamline administration, transform business practices, and eliminate excess bureaucracy.

## **Military Health Reform**

Senator McCain also led the committee to reform the military's [health program](#) to modernize health care services and provide troops and their families with higher quality care, better access to care, and a better experience of care.

## **Banning Torture**

During his more than five years as a POW in Vietnam, Senator McCain experienced the worst assaults on human dignity imaginable. This experience informed his firm opposition to the CIA's use of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques during the Bush Administration, and his fight to prohibit the use of torture once and for all.

In 2005, Senator McCain led passage of legislation including the [Detainee Treatment Act](#), which established the Army Field Manual as the uniform standard for the interrogation of Department of Defense detainees and prohibited cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment of persons in the detention of the U.S. government. He later championed provisions in the [Military Commissions Act of 2006](#) that prevented the Geneva Conventions from being weakened.

Senator McCain was a proponent of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence's investigation into the CIA's use of enhanced interrogation techniques and subsequent report to the public. He later worked with the lead author of the report, Senator Dianne Feinstein, in championing an amendment reaffirming the [ban on torture](#) by limiting the interrogation techniques across the whole of government to those in the Army Field Manual, which recognizes that torture and cruel treatment are ineffective interrogation methods and stain our national honor.

## Fighting for Winning Strategies

Informed by his long military career and engagement on the Armed Services Committee, Senator McCain was one of Congress's most outspoken and recognized leaders on national security issues. No matter what party was in control of the White House, Senator McCain used his voice and influence to ensure the military was executing a strategy for victory in every mission.

As Chairman, Senator McCain passed [legislation](#) requiring the Trump Administration to develop and submit to Congress a comprehensive strategy for the war in Afghanistan, the conflict in Syria, and ongoing threats against America's critical infrastructure in cyberspace. During the Obama Administration, Senator McCain was a leading critic of the president's handling of the conflict in Syria, pressed the administration for coherent strategies for the conflict in Afghanistan and the fight against ISIL, and argued for greater deterrence against rising threats such as Russia, China and Iran.

During the Bush Administration and in the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, Senator McCain fought for the creation of an independent [9/11 Commission](#) to identify how to best address the terrorist threat and decrease our domestic vulnerability. He also fought for the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security and the creation of the U.S. Northern Command with the specific responsibility of protecting the U.S. homeland. He was a vocal critic of the Bush Administration's early handling of the conflict in Iraq, and advocated for the troop surge, which ultimately turned the tide of war. And he made countless trips to Iraq and Afghanistan following the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, including making a tradition of spending nearly every Fourth of July holiday with U.S. troops serving in the Middle East.

## Supporting POW/MIA Families

As one of Congress's most recognized veterans and POWs, Senator McCain used his platform to raise awareness of POW/MIA issues, and support the families of those imprisoned or still missing in conflict. From 1991-1993, Senator McCain served on the [Senate Select Committee on POW/MIA Affairs](#) along with fellow Vietnam Veteran, then-Senator John Kerry to ensure the United States Government upheld its obligation to the service members who were imprisoned or missing during the war in Southeast Asia or prior conflicts. The committee's

unanimous report stated there was "no compelling evidence that proves that any American remains alive in captivity in Southeast Asia."